

Rights of Nature Conference

Speaker Biographies

Eduardo Abaroa is an artist whose recent work investigates the practices of archaeology and anthropology in relation to pre-Hispanic cultures in Mexico. *Proyecto de demolición del Museo de Antropología* (Project for the demolition of the Museum of Anthropology) meditates on Mexico's State-supported ethnographic fascination with its indigenous peoples, frequently taken as pre-colonial cultures of the past—as is exemplified in the famous Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City—a perspective that downplays their disenfranchisement and oppression in the present at the hands of the Mexican State. When indigeneity becomes the involuntary object of anthropological museumification, then Abaroa's multimedia proposal is to envisage the dismantling of the very infrastructure of anthropocentrism and the symbolic centre of the neo-colonial relation to the country's native peoples.

Amy Balkin's work relates to land and the geopolitical and economic relationships that frame it. Considering borders and common-pool resources, her cross-disciplinary research and social critique imagine the public domain outside current legal and discursive systems. She focuses on how humans create, interact with, and impact the social and material environments they inhabit, and questions how art can offer a platform to consider and establish a commons. Part-research project into fossil fuel pollution, part-conceptual proposal for its management, and part-legal-economic intervention into regulatory Green capitalism, *Public Smog* aims at establishing a public clean-air park in the atmosphere, realised through Balkin's purchasing of carbon offset credits on the open market only to retire and withhold them from industrial use. First opened briefly to the public during 2004 above California's South Coast Air Quality Management District, and opened over the European Union through 2008, *Public Smog* offers a critical model of eco-political activism geared toward showing the failures of capitalism's regulatory mechanisms.

Artist, educator and activist **Subhankar Banerjee's** photographs of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and other northern Alaskan regions have captured international attention. Working at the conflicted intersection of indigenous culture, biodiverse flora and fauna, and the corporate fossil-fuel industry, Banerjee locates the landscape at the centre of antagonistic geopolitical, economic, and environmental relations. There, caribou tracks and coal seams intermix in heterogeneous stratigraphic layers of animal life and geology-become-natural-resource, all seen through Banerjee's aerial lens as the writing of eco-industrial discord on the Earth's northern surface. Far from popular naturalist imagery, his photography always comes with extensive researched texts that explain the context, history, and political stakes of his pictures, which are also mobilised in diverse streams of distribution, including gallery and museum presentations, internet-based activism, and social-political movements. Recent publications include *Arctic Voices: Resistance at the Tipping Point* (Seven Stories Press, 2013).

Mabe Bethônico's artistic practice involves long-term research projects resulting in video and sound pieces, installations, lectures, publications and websites, using documentary sources, extensive interviews, and field recordings. She frequently works in dialogue with archives and other institutions, tests the limits between documentation and construction, and inquires into how information can be assembled and continuously reworked, questioning truth as much as redressing social and political

modes of invisibility. *Mineral Invisibility*, her work for the Rights of Nature exhibition, takes historical images of mining to refer to this industry in Minas Gerais, southeast Brazil, where Bethônico has conducted research since 2008. She investigates the political dimensions of memory and the public archive in relation to the fast-growing extraction industry that consumes landscapes but operates largely in shadowy darkness. Bethônico's counter-archive inspires public debate about the environmental and social costs of this mining operation, asking how to negotiate between workers' rights, the needs of economic livelihood, and the integrity of the natural environment?

Swiss video art researcher **Ursula Biemann** is an artist long interested in the geopolitics of migration and uneven resource distribution. In her project for the Rights of Nature she joins Paulo Tavares, Brazilian forensic analyst of land use policy and the politics of indigenous resistance in the Amazon. Their work *Forest Law* draws from research Biemann and Tavares carried out in the oil and mining frontier along the rain forest of south-eastern Ecuador. This area near the Peruvian border is considered the sovereign land of indigenous nations (such as the Sarayaku), and has experienced waves of exploitation from various national and international actors who continue to seek access to its untapped resources, even as pools of toxic waste from past extraction projects lie untreated on the forest floor. How can legal mechanisms, particularly those that recognize the rights of Mother Earth as recently enacted in Bolivia and Ecuador, protect such areas from human destruction? In their work the forest's nonhuman agents, Amerindian inhabitants and activists, state regulators and corporate interlopers, are positioned at the forefront of a legal revolution in relation to Earth law and the rights of *Pachamama*.

Mexican artist **Minerva Cuevas** critically investigates the signs of corporate globalisation, recreating its appropriated publicity and endowing it with newly revealed historical truths of its dispossessions, state-sponsored campaigns of violence, and ecocidal crimes against Mexico's subsistence-level, small-scale agricultural sector. She is founder of *Mejor Vida Corp.*, a non-profit corporation that creates and distributes products (subway tickets, cheaper barcode stickers, lottery cards, Student ID cards, etc.) and provides services (lowering prices at supermarkets, issuing recommendation letters, etc.) for free offering a possibility for playfully subversive participation within the capitalist system. Her *Hydrocarbon Series* refers to the Mexican oil industry and the 2007 PEMEX oil spill near Ciudad del Carmen in the Gulf of Mexico, one of numerous industrial accidents committed by the state-owned company that had a major destructive impact. In connection to this research Cuevas traces a link between the petrol industry and the Mexican Cacao crisis represented in the mural 'Bittersweet – Crunch'.

Cormac Cullinan is a practising environmental attorney, author based in Cape Town, South Africa. He is a director of the environmental law firm, Cullinan & Associates Inc and of the EnAct International an environmental governance consultancy. A former anti-apartheid activist, he has practised, taught and written about environmental law and policy since 1992, has worked in more than 20 countries and has drafted many environmental treaties, legislation and policies. Cormac's groundbreaking book "Wild Law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice" has played a significant role in informing and inspiring a growing international movement. In 2010 he led the drafting of the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth which was proclaimed on 22 April 2010 by the People's World Conference on

Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Bolivia. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the Global Alliance for Rights of Nature, a member of the International Tribunal of the Rights of Nature and in 2012 received the South African environmentalist of the year award. Cormac is regularly invited to be a key note speaker at international meetings and conferences and in 2011 he addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations in an interactive dialogue on living in harmony with Nature.

TJ Demos is a cultural critic, Professor in the History of Art and Visual Culture Department, and director of the Center for Creative Ecologies, at University of California, Santa Cruz. Prior to his recent appointment in 2015, he was Reader in the Department of Art History, University College London since 2005. He writes on contemporary art and politics, and is the author, most recently, of *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (Duke University Press, 2013), and *Return to the Postcolony: Spectres of Colonialism in Contemporary Art* (Sternberg, 2013). In 2013, he guest-edited a special issue of *Third Text* (no. 120) on the subject of "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology." He is co-curator of *Rights of Nature: Art and Ecology in the Americas*, currently at Nottingham Contemporary, and *Specters: A Ciné-Politics of Haunting*, a screening series of artist films at the Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid in 2014. He is currently finishing a new book, entitled *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art in the Age of Climate Change*.

Eriel Tchekwie Deranger is a Dene Indigenous activist and member of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation (ACFN) of Northern Alberta, Canada. Eriel is currently employed as the Tar Sands Campaign and Communication Coordinator for ACFN. Her work focuses on creating greater awareness about the impacts of the Alberta Tar Sands and demanding that all levels of government and the private sector fully implement the unique Indigenous rights her people hold as described by Treaty 8, and the United Nation Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples. The Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation is most notable for suing Shell Canada for unmet past Tar Sands Impact Benefit agreements as well as challenging Shell's application for permits to expand and build new tar sands projects in Northern Alberta. Shell is currently one of the largest tar sands operators. The newly proposed projects would contribute to further erosion of the fragile ecosystems, critical wildlife habitat, and Indigenous territory in Northern Alberta.

Jean Fisher is a graduate in Zoology and Fine Art practice, and a freelance writer on contemporary art and the legacies of colonialism. She has worked closely with artists and scholars from Ireland, Native North America, Cuba, Mexico, the Black British diaspora and Palestine. Whilst resident in NYC she co-curated exhibitions of contemporary American Indian art with Jimmie Durham. She is a former editor of *Third Text*, editor of the anthologies *Global Visions: Towards A New Internationalism in the Arts* (1994), *Re-verberations: Tactics of Resistance, Forms of Agency* (2000), and co-editor with the Cuban critic and curator Gerardo Mosquera of *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture* (2004). A volume of her earlier writings was published as *Vampire in the Text*, 2003. More recently she has edited the Chronology section of the catalogue raisonné of James Coleman's work (2010), a new volume of Jimmie Durham's writings, *Waiting to be Interrupted* (2014), and writings on Rasheed Araeen, *The Rise of Icarus* (2014). She has contributed an introduction to Kamal Boullata's monograph on the Gazan artist Hani Zurob, *Between Exits* (2012), and essays for the catalogues of

the Sydney Biennale (2012) and the work of Willie Doherty, Yinka Shonibare and Steve McQueen. She is a Professor emerita at Middlesex University.

The Gaia Foundation is passionate about regenerating cultural and biological diversity, and restoring a respectful relationship with Earth - the primary source of law that governs life. Together with long-term partners in Africa, South America, Asia and Europe, they work with local communities to secure land, seed, food and water sovereignty. Through the revival of indigenous knowledge and customary governance systems and the protection of sacred territories, local self-governance is strengthened. Gaia and partners are committed to addressing the root causes of today's most pressing ecological, social and economic injustices, and supporting the evolution and practice of Earth Law to strengthen the resilience of ecosystems and communities www.gaiafoundation.org. Gaia is one of the founding members of the Yes to Life, No to Mining movement www.yestolifenotomining.org.

Carine Nadal works for the Gaia Foundation as Earth Law Support Officer, providing legal research and advocacy support to indigenous communities, particularly in Africa, for the revival, practice and legal recognition of customary governance systems based on Earth Jurisprudence/Earth Law principles. She is also a passionate advocate of the Rights of Nature and the protection and recognition of sacred natural sites and territories. Carine has developed numerous educational and advocacy materials including Gaia's [Earth Jurisprudence Learning Centre](#) and co-drafting Resolutions 11 and 12 of the World Wilderness Congress 2013 which recognise all forms of protected areas as no go areas for mining. Carine is a committee member of Wild Law UK and the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature.

Brian Holmes is a writer, cultural critic and activist who has, since the Carnival against Capital in the City of London in 1999, taken part in and written about many of the large demonstrations against corporate globalization around the world. Holmes is a contributor to many journals, magazines, and web venues and lectures in self-organized spaces, museums, and universities. His essays have been gathered into three anthologies: *Hieroglyphs of the Future: Art & Politics in a Networked Era* (Zagreb: WHW, 2002); *Unleashing the Collective Phantoms: Essays in Reverse Imagineering* (New York: Autonomedia, 2007); and *Escape the Overcode: Activist Art in the Control Society* (Eindhoven and Zagreb: Vanabbemuseum/WHW, 2009), a wide ranging examination of networks, films, institutions and protest movements across Latin America, Europe, and Asia. His recent work, on the aesthetics of crisis, examines how societies confront the new set of political and ecological challenges brought on by the tremendous acceleration of the globalized economy.

During their artistic and discursive collaboration, **The Otolith Group** have inquired into subjects as diverse as essayistic practice, sci-fi aesthetics, futurology and the speculative ecologies of media, aural, and material environments. Part prequel and part premonition, their video *Medium Earth* unfolds from research undertaken in California, where the artists attuned themselves to the traces of seismic activities reverberating in the psychic realm of mediums or sensitives able to read their own bodily sensations as predictive of seismic upheaval elsewhere. Interpreting earthquakes as a kind of tellurian language, *Medium Earth* listens to the southwestern American deserts, translates the writing of its boulders, and deciphers the calligraphies of its expansion cracks and fractures. With *Medium Earth*, The Otolith Group points towards a hitherto unsuspected sensorial dimension implied by the rights of nature that begins by cultivating an attentiveness to the translations of the Earth's testimony and hints at the emergence of a new perceptual capacity.

Trained as an industrial engineer, **Fernando Palma Rodríguez** infuses his artistic projects with recycled materials that animate his zoomorphic forms with robotic movements. Bringing together outsider science and improvised electronic programming with the cosmological metaphysics and environmental activism drawn from his indigenous Nahuatl culture—he is a founding member of Calpulli Tecalco, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the restoration of the natural environment, history, and culture of the original peoples of the region—Palma's objects feed on electricity as an animistic force, reviving animal life otherwise threatened with disappearance. His work often focuses on the ecological situation in the district of Milpa Alta, located at the southern edge of Mexico City, threatened with informal urbanization and deforestation, where the viewing of nonhuman personhood, the rights of nature, and the becoming-animal of the machine, resonate with traditional knowledge systems once commonly shared across the continent.

Elizabeth Peredo Beltran is a social psychologist, writer and activist based in Bolivia. She focuses her work on water as a common, environmental and cultural good. Peredo co-founded TAHIPAMU (The Women's Participation in History Workshop) in the nineties, was the Coordinator of the National Committee for Domestic Workers Rights and from the nineties has researched, published and campaigned for the rights of domestic workers. Since 2000 she has been involved in activism around water struggles producing reports, books, articles and video scripts on economic and climate justice. For some years she has promoted the Blue October Campaign in Bolivia (<http://octubreazulbolivia.blogspot.co.uk/>) a social mobilization for water as a common. Since 2006 she has been the Executive Director of Solon Foundation and Casa Museo Walter Solon Romero based in La Paz <http://www.funsolon.org/>. In 2009 she was one of the promoters of the International Tribunal for Climate Justice in Cochabamba, Bolivia. She combines arts and social activism in her work, connecting with artists, women and advocates for water rights. She is currently promoting a creative initiative called Braiding Hopes (<https://trenzandoilusiones.wordpress.com/>) and the Bolivia Observatory on climate change <http://obccd.org/>.

Wild Law UK is a group of lawyers, activists, students and academics from a variety of backgrounds. The common belief of those involved in Wild Law UK is that governance systems, including law, must be rapidly reoriented so that they support, rather than undermine, the long term health and integrity of the Earth. This approach is known as Earth-centred governance, which recognises that humans are just one of the many species and ecosystems inhabiting the earth, and that human well-being depends on the integrity of the Earth's ecosystems. It seeks to rebalance humans' relationship with the Earth system, so that the relationship contributes to the well-being of all species now and in the future. In particular, Wild Law UK aims to secure Rights of Nature in law. <http://www.wildlawuk.org>.

Tom Brennan is a lawyer and has worked in the voluntary sector for a number of years primarily providing assistance to communities with environmental concerns. His involvement in wild law matters began in 2006 and he has been a member of the Wild Law UK Steering Committee since 2011. Tom's interest in a more Earth-centred approach recently led him to study biodynamic horticulture and he is a director of the Biodynamic Land Trust which helps him to maintain one hand in the soil and the other in the law.